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ABSTRACT

At present there is controversy among members of the International Reading Association (IRA) regarding the role that IRA should assume in addressing the questions of accrediting graduate programs in reading education and certifying reading professionals. In this document, four reading educators present their views on these issues. The first article lists possible reasons for having IRA move into the areas of certification and program approval and raises questions for consideration by those contemplating such an endeavor. The second article argues that IRA must aggressively pursue the certification and accreditation issue or face the eventual demise of the reading specialist. In contrast, the third article states that IRA should not become involved in certification and accreditation since doing so would stifle innovation and hamper institutions that are dedicated to program improvement. The final article cites problems created by the present lack of standards and suggests approaches through which IRA can establish standards for monitoring the quality of the profession. (GW)

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EPISTLE

PUBLICATION FORUM FOR PROFESSORS OF READING TEACHER EDUCATORS: A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

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[IRA Involvement in the Accreditation of Graduate Programs in Reading Education and the Certification of Reading Professionals: Pros and Cons]

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EPISTLE

The Publication Forum of
Professors of Reading Teacher Educators
A Special Interest Group of the
International Reading Association

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Guest Editor's Introduction . . .

With the ever increasing pressure being exerted on the educational profession to ameliorate the quality of instruction at our institutions of higher learning, it is not uncommon to hear our own colleagues raise questions regarding the role professional organizations should assume in addressing themselves to this issue. Since the reading profession is not exempt from such criticism the Professors of Reading Teacher Educators Special Interest Group thought it would be professionally advantageous for IRA to take a more introspective look at itself in regard to two issues--program accreditation and the certification of reading professionals. As part of our Miami program, a panel which consisted of Albert J. Kingston, University of Georgia, Thomas D. Horn, University of Texas at Austin, Ralph Staiger, International Reading Association, Roger Farr, Indiana University, Charles Peters, Oakland Schools, Deborah Osen Hancock, California State University-Fullerton, addressed themselves to the following questions, "Should IRA accredit graduate programs in reading education or certify reading professionals?" Since many cogent points were made by the panel, EPISTLE felt that readers might appreciate an opportunity to read a collection of articles focusing upon the same issue. Four reading educators agreed to present their views on this issue.

In his article Ralph C. Staiger, the Executive Director of IRA, "has attempted to look at all angles of the situation." In analyzing the various issues related to accreditation and certification he lists concerns and raises questions for consideration by those contemplating such an endeavor.

In the second article Nathaniel A. Peters, the Associate Director of the Reading and Language Center at Oakland Schools, Pontiac, Michigan, states what he believes are the essential responsibilities of a profession and concludes that there is an acute need for the reading profession to establish standards. It is his opinion that IRA should more aggressively pursue the certification and accreditation issue or face the eventual demise of the reading specialist.

Thomas D. Horn, professor at the University of Texas at Austin, believes that involving IRA in the certification

process would only serve to "stifle innovation and hamper institutions which are dedicated to program improvement." In addition he feels that if accreditation and certification became the responsibility of IRA, it might become financially prohibitive when one considers the small percentage of professionals who would not meet the standards established by the profession.

In the last article Charles W. Peters, a secondary reading consultant for Oakland Schools, Pontiac, Michigan, presents a different perspective. He believes that IRA must become involved with the certification and accreditation process just as other professional organizations have taken it upon themselves to monitor their own affairs. He substantiates his position by citing a number of problems which are related to the lack of standards and then offers suggestions for how IRA might establish a procedure for accomplishing this task.

Charles W. Peters

Dr. Staiger has long served as executive director of the International Reading Association. Prior to joining IRA he held positions as professor and administrator in reading education programs.

PANEL DISCUSSION REMARKS ON ACCREDITATION OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS OR CERTIFICATION OF READING PROFESSIONALS BY THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

Ralph C. Staiger

The accreditation of Graduate School programs, and the certification of reading professionals is not a new idea, and has been discussed periodically since the inception of the Association. Perhaps IRA is now of age and is ready to explore the topic seriously.

We are presently providing information in three ways: first, the publication of Minimum Standards for the training of reading specialists and for the professional preparation in reading of classroom teachers; second, the publication of "Graduate Programs and Faculty in Reading;" and third, the ongoing collection of State certification requirements in reading. These have been used by many state groups in their certification drives, by individuals looking for places where they can obtain training, and, doubtless, by department heads for comparative purposes.

The Professional Standards recommendations are being revised by the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee, and a draft is presently being circulated among a sample of the membership for comment before it is approved by the Board. The committee has already been working on the project for two years.

My job requires looking at all angles of a situation. Let me share with you some of the ideas which have occurred to me on the subject of IRA accreditation and certification.

Here are some possible reasons we should move into certification or program approval:

1. IRA should take the lead in raising standards in the profession.

2. It would be good for the profession.

3. There is a need to dignify or legitimize the "Reading Specialist" title. It would help employers to know whose credentials are meaningful.

4. There exists a real problem with self-appointed (or administration-appointed) reading specialists.

5. Reading training programs are very different in various institutions of higher education.

6. Some other groups have done so for their clinical programs--the American Psychological Association and the American Speech and Hearing Association, for instance.

7. State teacher certification does not seem to cover all personnel.

8. The removal of unprepared individuals would help students.

But before we move too quickly, here are some comments and questions which need to be asked about reading program approval:

1. Who will control the makeup of the standard-making body?

2. Who will determine what an approved program is?

3. The reading department is usually in a college or school of education; how can institutional requirements be taken into consideration for an approved program?

4. What will be the major thrust of the program to be recommended--clinical practice, classroom practice, research?

5. There are many different emphases in ongoing programs; sometimes these variations are necessary because of local conditions.

6. Support from related fields, and special resources available in a college or university may be very important; how can they be included in the criteria for an approved program?

7. Personnel shifts have been the norm in the past, and since the quality of a program depends upon the compentency of the staff, programs are often ephemeral.

8. Where will financial support for the program-approval procedures come from?

9. What should the period of program approval be? Three years? Five years? Forever?

10. What steps will be taken when an institution no longer offers adequate training?

In addition, there are questions which need to be asked about Association licensing of reading personnel:

1. What kinds of reading personnel should be certified?

2. How will reading certification affect the teaching of reading in subject matter areas?

3. What kinds of "grandfather clauses" will be necessary? How will they affect the overall certification program?

4. What are the legal ramifications of an Association's certifying individuals?

5. How will changing political needs and fashions affect certification standards?

6. How can the need for various personnel be anticipated? The Licensing board could be ten years behind the field, and could be a negative conservative influence.

7. Who will control the certification boards' appointments?

8. How best can administrators of colleges, state departments, and local schools be convinced to accept IRA certification?

9. Can Association certification be enforced? How long would it take to legalize state licensing procedures?

10. What political opposition to IRA certification can be anticipated?

11. Who will pay for IRA reading certification?

12. What kind of insurance coverage will be necessary for licensing?

I hope these questions have not sounded too negative. They have been posed as realistic concerns which should be answered in the best interests of children and professionals. I hope we will examine these and other issues carefully, and that we will develop realistic plans for the future.

Nat Peters is the Associate Director of the Reading and Language Center at Oakland Schools, Pontiac, Michigan.

IRA AND THE DEMISE OF THE READING SPECIALIST

Nathaniel A. Peters

The raisons d'être of a professional organization are multiple. Although a consensus of what constitutes the legitimate responsibilities of a professional organization to its members would be impossible to reach, this writer believes there are at least six such essential responsibilities.

First, it should provide a forum for the dissemination of knowledge to its members. Second, it should stimulate research in the discipline it represents. Third, it should reward the professional accomplishments of its members. Fourth, it should represent the interests of the profession in national and state levels of government. Fifth, it should establish standards of professional competency and provide a process of certification for members who meet those standards. Sixth, and closely related to the preceeding responsibility, a professional organization should certify the facilities that deliver clinical and consulting services to the community and the training programs that purport to train members of the profession or those who aspire to enter it.

It is the measured opinion of this writer that the International Reading Association rates a grade of A on points 1 through 3 and a grade of E on points 4 through 6. Inasmuch as it is beyond the scope of this article to deal substantively with all three points, the rationale for the failing grade on point 5 will be discussed.

A defensible and desirable function of a professional organization is to establish standards of professional competence and in the most expedient manner possible

provide long-term monitoring of an individual's professional competence. For some reason IRA has avoided the issue of certification like the proverbial plague.

What are some of the results of this apparant lack of concern for national level standards and certification requirements? Using the state of Michigan as a frame of reference, the reading specialist has taken some rather heavy lumps in the last several years. Many of these professional catastrophes could have been avoided if the International Reading Association had provided leadership in certifying qualified reading specialists and the facilities in which they practice their profession.

First, reading specialists are being discharged from their positions or transferred back to the classroom and are being replaced by learning disabilities specialists. The explanation underlying these dismissals are based on a reduction of funds for reading services and the assumption that the reading specialist is not trained to handle serious cases of reading disability whereas the learning disabilities specialist is. The public has even picked up the message that the learning disabilities specialist is more adequately prepared to assist children who are experiencing reading difficulties than is the reading specialist. Not infrequently parents will ask if their child can be placed on the caseload of the learning disabilities specialist rather than the reading specialist. When asked for the reasons for their decision they have indicated that they thought learning disabilities specialists are trained to teach the children with "problems." It would be easier to persuade parents that the reading specialist is trained to help their child if it were possible to indicate that reading specialists are certified by their profession as being competent to help disabled readers.

Secondly, funding for Reading Support Services has plummeted from a high of $13,000,000 in 1967 to a low of $2,000,000 in 1976-77. Our Governor even wanted to entirely eliminate funding for developmental and remedial reading programs since he felt reading services could best be provided by compensatory education or special education specialists. In most cases, these individuals do not have the formal course

work or supervised practica in developmental, corrective, or remedial reading to merit the responsibilities they have. The diligent efforts of the executive board and members of the Michigan Reading Association - without any help from our national organization - rescued the Reading Support Services legislation from oblivion.

As a member of a committee that communicated with a significant number of representatives and senators regarding the legislation, I can say with a certain degree of certitude that funds for reading programs would not have eroded if our profession was viewed as a profession with standards and qualifications. Much of our recent struggle with the Michigan Legislature was an attempt to convince legislators that reading specialists were more competent in dealing with reading instruction than either compensatory education specialists or learning disabilities specialists.

As the situation now stands, funds are dispersed to specific categories on the basis of political clout (sadly, IRA lacks this, too) of special interest groups (i.e., professional and parent organizations) rather than any other factor. In the quest for national, state, and local funds the profession that is viewed as having more adequately trained members will have less difficulty obtaining funding.

Finally, other professions are encroaching on areas of functioning heretofore viewed as within the domain of the reading specialist. For example, in one of our larger school districts reading readiness activities for all the kindergartens are conducted by the speech and hearing specialist. The speech and hearing specialists also consult with the kindergarten teachers on improving the readiness curriculum throughout the district. Few, if any, reading specialists are involved in teacher consultation regarding reading readiness. A truly bizarre situation that is potentially harmful to children and teachers. In another district, reading specialists are not invited to Educational Planning and Programming Committee meetings of children diagnosed as "learning disabled" even though the major presenting difficulty is a reading problem. In both situations the message is clear - reading specialists do not have much information to offer regarding reading readiness or reading disabilities.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the millenary thinking of Ilvan Illich, professional standards are here to stay and with more competition for local, state, and federal funds they are possibly going to become even more important in the future.

Reading educators and the specialists they train must realize that the reading profession is at a critical juncture. Our professional escutcheon are tarnished. Our areas of expertise are being gradually eroded by more influential, visible, and vocal professions. Our professional roles are poorly understood by tbe public and by national and state level politicians. The most important question to ask is whether this malaise if treatable and, if so, how.

Obviously, several types of action must be taken. Inasmuch as this is supposed to be an article of reasonable length, I'll concentrate on what I believe to be the major cause of and solution(s) for the eroding support shown our profession. Both the cause of and solution for our problems rest to a certain extent on the shoulders of the leadership of the International Reading Association. Because of their inertia, the profession has little visability in Washington or in the state capitols of our country. Proof is in a simple experiment. The next time a piece of national legislation effecting reading instruction comes to the floor of the House of Representatives call your local member of Congress and ask him if he's been informed of the International Reading Association position on the bill or if he's been contacted by an IRA lobbyist. The likelihood is that he'll have received no information from IRA, and will probably even ask what the International Reading Association is. Then ask him if the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, American Speech and Hearing and/or the American Psychological Association, its members or lobbyist have contacted the said Representative. The speculation is that at least one of the above organizations will have communicated their position on the proposed legislation to the Representative. IRA takes pride in the number of its members (as does the Vic Tanny Health Spas) and its new mortgage-free, Delaware national headquarters, but comments little on its political action or its efforts to develop professional standards or certify members.

It is my feeling that IRA has a serious image problem. As a professional organization it is an artifact of earlier times when organizations representing educators were quasi social organizations, dominated by a faint-hearted leadership that was more reactive than proactive to the critical issues facing the profession.

If we are going to survive as an educational specialty, we need both a nationally organized effort to certify reading specialists and more intrepid leadership by our national "leaders" in Newark, Delaware.

Tom Horn is head of the reading program at the University of Texas at Austin. He has recently led an extensive study of reading programs in an effort to develop guidelines for future development of the program at Texas.

IRA SHOULD NEITHER ACCREDITE GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN READING EDUCATION NOR CERTIFY READING PROFESSIONALS

Thomas D. Horn

Just as in any sizable group of people with common concerns, there is always "that five percent" who manage to foul the nest. Characteristics of this untidy act when performed in the reading field include: (1) graduate reading diploma mills, including correspondence degrees; (2) pseudo programs, both graduate and undergraduate; (3) single person reading "departments" where one individual is knowledgeable enough to offer ten to twelve courses single handedly (a colleague of mine, we'll call him Snerd, takes the position that when a student takes Snerd's first course, he has had "Snerd One"; when he takes Snerd's second course, he has had "Snerd Two"; when he completes a third course with Snerd, he has had Snerd, phooey); (4) the blissful individual who feels a second course in reading to be unnecessary since he has already had one course, or, the one who feels fully competent to teach reading since he/she herself/himself already knows how to read; (5) those who state they have the Ph.D. in reading when, in fact, that "program" consists of one or two reading courses per se (individual instruction and dissertation diligence are fine, but rarely the equivalent of a viable program plus individual instruction and a dissertation in reading); (6) the reading instructor who prides himself in resembling William S. Gray, who also never had a formal course in reading as preparation for his work.

The proposal to set up IRA machinery for the purpose of accreditation and certification, in my opinion, would stifle innovation and hamper institutions which are dedicated to program improvement. It would be something like the teacher who keeps the whole class after school for the doings of one recalcitrant or the base commander who restricts all personnel to quarters because one enterprising GI mailed an anonymous Christmas present to the CO's wife in the form of an officer's tunic complete with stars, service stripes, compaign ribbons . . . and in her exact size.

The IRA 1973 and 1976 editions of Graduate Programs in Faculty and Reading, have been useful documents for professionals seeking information concerning faculty and programs in various institutions in the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, some data are misleading. For example, one institution reports ten full-time students pursuing a master's degree program, presumably in reading, and one thousand part-time students pursuing a master's degree program, again assumed to be in reading. A more meaningful statistic for prospective students and program evaluators would be the number of master's degrees in reading conferred representing x courses and y credit hours, say, between July 1, 1976, and June 30, 1977. Also, although the listing of courses gives some idea of program breadth, more solid data would include the number of times each course is offered during a calendar year. Another bit of data which should shed light on an institutional reading program would be the proportion of practicum or "hands on" instruction of children which is represented in the complete program. For example, the University of Texas at Austin allocates approximately 50% of its undergraduate and graduate programs to supervised instruction.

There is little argument that most reading people have a genuine concern for improving the quality of existing programs and professionals. My rationale for taking the position against IRA participation in accreditation and certification includes the following: (1) Anyone who has experienced the preparation required for NCATE and state department visitation teams for the purpose of accreditation are well aware of the time, expense, limitations, and lamentations involved in such visitations; (2) IRA could better spend its time and money in developing competency guidelines

to which each institution could respond in ways appropriate to their resources; in the event resources were insufficient to adequately meet the guidelines, then institutional integrity should take over and suggest withdrawal from the field (perhaps a naive, idealistic notion); (3) IRA should work cooperatively with existing certification agencies not in competition with them; this can be done through development of the competency guidelines; (4) institutions inaugurating self-study programs for the improvement of quality might request a small visitation team from IRA, expenses to be borne by the institution, to make suggestions as to how the competency guidelines might better be met; and (5) those few institutions guilty of flagrant unprofessional activities might be censured by an ethics committee set up for this purpose (since everyone seems to be suing everybody else these days, we would need to look into the legal implications of such actions); by direction of IRA's Board of Directors, the ethics committee could ask offending institutions to show cause as to why they should not be censured.

So I say that IRA should not accredit graduate programs in reading education or certify reading professionals. I do say that IRA should continue to be concerned with qualitative improvement in graduate programs and the competencies of reading professionals.

Charles Peters is a reading consultant in the Oakland Schools Intermediate District, Pontiac, Michigan. He is a regular presenter at professional meetings and an editorial advisor for EPISTLE.

TOMORROW WILL BE TOO LATE: THE NEED TO CERTIFY PROFESSIONALS AND ACCREDITE GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN READING

Charles W. Peters

In reacting to a question such as the one this issue focuses upon, "Should IRA accredit graduate programs in reading education or certify reading professionals," I was always taught to clearly state my views so the reader would have no difficulty discerning the position taken. In responding to the aforementioned question, I am unequivocally in favor of IRA clearly developing standards* by which both graduate programs and graduate students, the products of those programs, can be evaluated. While I realize that many of my colleagues feel that such a move would be an anathema, I do not believe our profession is functioning any better than our economy did under the "invisible hand concept," espoused by the 18th century economist Adam Smith, which stated that a free and uncontrolled economy will regulate itself. Like the free enterprise system has shown a need for some regulation, the reading profession has also demonstrated a need for regulation.

Problems Created by the Lack of Standards

At least two major problems have emerged as a result of the current "laissez faire" approach. First, unqualified teachers are occupying reading positions, while qualified teachers are under or unemployed. Presently, many states have

*In this article standards refer to clearly delineated criteria by which a professional organization can monitor its members. Standards do not refer to guidelines or monographs suggesting what ought to be.

no requirements or standards governing the certification of reading teachers. Michigan is one such example. Neither elementary or secondary teachers are required to take a single course solely devoted to the teaching of reading. Furthermore, a teacher with three semester credits in reading can refer to him/herself as a consultant, a reading specialist, or any other reading related title he/she wishes to confer upon him/herself. While some would argue that this is purely a state matter and not the concern of an international organization, IRA should be providing more leadership in this area. Without national standards, states are left without an adequate model to follow. While this may not seem to be much of a problem for well established state organizations, those in need of assistance have little alternative but to re-invent the wheel when it comes to developing their own standards. The whole process could be expedited by having a central body responsible for creating, implementing, evaluating, updating and monitoring the standards adopted by the profession. Therefore, the parent organization should establish a model which can be implemented and emulated by the various state affiliates.

The impact of this problem transcends local and state affairs and ultimately influences how the profession functions at the national level. Any educator who has experience with Title I realizes that guidelines insuring that "qualified" and "competent" teachers are responsible for the delivery of services are nonexistent. This is not to suggest that qualified people are not a part of Title I, because they most certainly are. However, because of the minimal standards attached to this legislation, unqualified people are frequently responsible for delivering services they do not have the qualifications or skills to perform. If IRA had standards that governed the profession, they could be attached to national legislation and thus avoid the present dilemma in which the reading profession finds itself, supporting a program which lacks adequate guidelines.

Second, not only are unqualified people occupying positions in state and nationally funded programs far beyond their capabilities, but many of our graduate schools are turning out students who are undertrained. Since my primary responsibility is to work with reading teachers in a variety of public school settings, it is not uncommon to hear them express concern about the inadequate training they received.

One of the more commonly expressed criticisms deals with the inability of their course work to differentiate between either the level (elementary, secondary, or university) or role (administrator, classroom teacher, clinician, consultant) they will assume once they complete their degree. For example, it is not unusual to find developmental (secondary and elementary) and remedial (secondary and elementary) reading teachers all trained in the same manner.

Do all students need the same type of training program? I think not. For instance, if a person is to function as a consultant, then, as IRA's own guidelines for the training of consultants suggests (see Reading Specialists: Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualifications, 1968), their course work should reflect both the level and the area of concentration.

I am fully cognizant of the fact that most university programs offer different courses; but unfortunately most master's degree students, for example, are channeled through the same basic courses with the exception of three to six credits. One cannot train a generalist to do a specialist's job. If a person is to function as a consultant, he/she should be trained as a consultant. Furthermore, if a person is to work as a classroom teacher with some responsibility for teaching reading, his/her course work should correspond to his/her needs.

To prevent the perpetuation of such problems, IRA should first establish standards which clearly delineated between levels of expertise within the profession, e.g., classroom teacher, reading teacher, remedial reading teacher, reading specialist, clinician, consultant, administrator, and second, create a procedure to accredit university training programs on the basis of staff, courses, resources, and student competencies. We hear so much about evaluation, but how much time has the reading profession spent evaluating its own programs or the products of those programs? The only way this can be accomplished is to create standards and then measure ourselves by those standards.

There is nothing stronger than peer review and presently there does not seem to be much of that going on in our profession. Without standards we cannot control our own professional destiny. It is obvious that if we do not, someone else (state and national legislative bodies, other professional organizations, or special interest groups) will.

For instance, in New York the legislature has devised minimal levels of competencies; should state legislators decide who is qualified to teach reading? Obviously, they should not, but such actions represent a portent of what is to come if the reading profession does not decide to monitor its own affairs. It is difficult to control your own destiny if the profession does not possess a concept of where it is going. Our present desultory approach, if allowed to continue, will have deleterious effects on the field of reading.

Alternative Approaches

One alternative to our present dilemma is to have IRA, with input from its members, promulgate a procedure by which it can monitor the quality of the profession. I believe the following suggestions might serve as a beginning point for this needed reform. First, a Board of Examiners could be established to certify graduates who have completed a master's, specialist, or doctoral program at universities affiliated with the professional organization. The certification of professionals could take two forms: (1) a series of required courses that could correspond to IRA's guidelines for reading specialists; and (2) an examination, which would vary according to the student's area of concentration, could be administered by the Board of Examiners to all students completing graduate degrees in reading. The test would assess certain competencies deemed essential by the profession.

If other professional organizations such as law, medicine, dentistry, and speech and hearing can certify their members through similar procedures, then I do not believe it would be impossible for the reading profession to undertake a similar task. In fact the medical profession has gone a step further in that various boards certify specialties (orthepedics and radiology) within the profession. If the medical profession can delineate between subcategories within their own fields, why isn't it possible for the reading profession to create certification standards that would distinguish between remedial teachers (elementary and secondary), consultants (elementary and secondary), reading teachers (elementary and secondary, and clinicians (elementary and secondary)?

The secondary component in the certification process would deal with the accreditation of professional training programs. IRA could establish a second board which would

have as its major responsibility the evaluation of university training programs. This would be done to insure that quality programs exist. In accrediting university programs the board would be concerned with such variables as the credentials of the staff, the content of courses, and the professor-student ratio in such important classes as reading practica.

These variables are only a few of the factors that contribute to efficient reading programs. For instance, problems like the overcrowding of practica are not uncommon. I have talked with individuals who have been enrolled in graduate practica which have had a student-professor ratio of 1 to 30. Adequate supervision under such conditions is impossible. Given the financial problems confronting most universities, pressures to increase class size will continue unabated. As a result, these circumstances make it impossible for universities to continue to serve as their own gate keepers. Therefore, the monitoring of their programs should become a shared endeavor.

One of the end results of this process would be the elimination of weak programs. This would provide prospective students and employers with some indication as to which programs meet the minimal standards of the profession. In addition by establishing these standards IRA could work closely with other professional organizations, e.g., the National Association of Secondary School Principals, in an attempt to get them to adopt its standards as a criteria for hiring reading personnel.

One of the weaknesses with this approach is that a professional organization can monitor only those institutions and individuals that are affiliated with it. However, if the professional organization is a major institution within the field of reading, then individuals and universities should want to be affiliated with it.

It will not be an easy process to establish standards and accreditation procedures. However, if a task is worthy of the effort, it should be undertaken. I strongly encourage IRA to begin such needed action.